

# ***THE BOYS' PARADISE:***

## ***A SUMMER VISITOR'S ACCOUNT OF CAMP CHOCORUA***

By Elizabeth Balch, with illustrations by W.A. Rogers

In the Indian language the meaning of "Asquam" is "shining waters," and surely no name could better describe the beautiful lake of sparkling blue, which, nestling among the noble White Mountains, is dotted with numerous islands. Upon one of these islands is Camp Chocorua, so called from the mountain of that name,—the highest point to be seen in the chain of hills inclosing the lake.

Some five years ago it was decided to establish on this island a summer camp for boys, the term to begin in June, and to end about the tenth of September. The first summer the camp opened with some half-dozen boys. Last season, twenty-five manly little fellows tumbled in and out of the lake, like water brownies, perfectly fearless, paddling canoes which had been made by themselves, swimming and growing active and healthy in the strong, pure mountain air.

Note: Elizabeth Balch's brother Ernest was the founder of Camp Chocorua. She visited the camp one summer and wrote this article about the experience the camp offered boys. The article was published in *St. Nicholas Magazine*, vol. 13, no. 8 (June 1886).

The article has been edited to make it easier to read.



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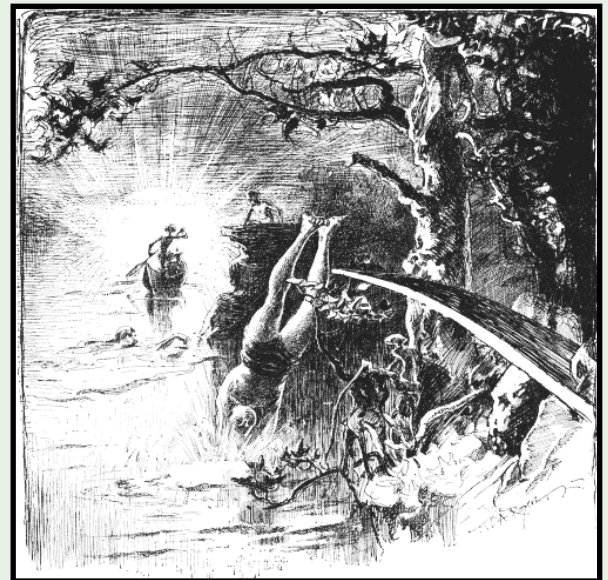
Life at Camp Chocorua is a busy one. There are no "book lessons," to be sure; but a good many things are taught that are not always to be found in books. To begin with, bracing mountain air and active out-of-door life give a keen appetite, and it is no small undertaking to provide food for twenty or thirty hungry mouths. Then, too, the tin dishes and plates in which the food is cooked and eaten have to be cleaned and kept in order, and "dish-washing" therefore becomes a necessity. The kitchen-beach is a lively place at these times.

In the carpenter's shop, there is work of various kinds to be done; canoes are built, but no boy is allowed to paddle or sail a canoe until he is adept at swimming, and can be trusted to take care of himself in the water. This rule is one of the strictest in camp.

The *Golden Rod* is the camp newspaper. It is edited and entirely conducted by the boys.

The boys are divided into four crews, and these crews undertake in turn the different kinds of work: one day, the cooking; the next, dish-washing; the third, police duty, which includes the tidying of beaches, and all work assigned to no other crew. The fourth day is "off duty." This changes the kind of work done daily, and yet gives each boy a chance of learning all the tasks.

The boys sleep in wooden buildings, which are roofed over, but thoroughly ventilated, and the lads seem cozy enough lying curled up in army blankets or on mattresses placed on the floor. They may, if they wish, take a dip in the lake before breakfast, and no one who has not tried it can realize the brightening, bracing, "wakening-up" effect of that morning dip! How it clears the brain and invigorates the body, making one feel equal to all things, strong and ready to do! The regular morning swim does not take place until later,—about eleven o'clock,

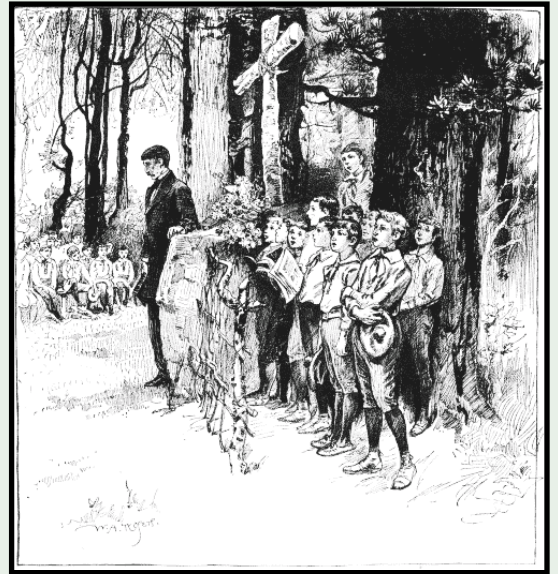


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after the camp work is completed. All through the week the boys may wear shoes and stockings, or they may go barefoot,

just as they happen to fancy, and the camp costume consists of a gray flannel shirt and short trousers.

On Sundays, however, they all wear, in addition, scarlet stockings, and scarlet caps, while their gray shirts are laced with scarlet cords. A bonny crew they look, as they push off in the "church boat" at three o'clock, to meet, at Cox's beach, half a mile away, any visitors from the neighboring hotel or farm-houses who may wish to join in the Sunday services. These are conducted in a lovely spot called the "chapel," on the farther side of the island. Rustic seats are ranged around an open space, in the center of which, above a rock forming a natural altar, rises a large cross made of white birch. This altar is dressed with leaves and flowers by the boys, before the service begins; and after the little congregation is assembled, one hears in the distance clear young voices singing some processional hymn, and along a path through the woods, with the sunlight dancing in and out among the branches, the boys come nearer and nearer. Then they take their places at the place appointed for the choir, whilst Mr. Ernest Balch takes his on the other side of the flower-decked rock, and reads the service.



The offertory made at these services goes to the different charities contributed to by the camp, and more than one sick boy or girl in different hospitals have whiled away hours of loneliness and suffering by reading ST. NICHOLAS, which those happy, healthy boys at Camp Chocorua have sent them as a solace in their pain. Sunday afternoon is devoted to writing letters to home-folk, and in the evening, at prayers, Mr. Balch has a quiet talk with the boys in the chapel.



The summer sports take place in August, and consist of fancy swimming and diving, canoe and boat racing, base-ball and tennis. Last year the parents

and friends of the boys, to the number of one hundred, accepted the invitation of the camp, and dined there at the conclusion of the sports, which lasted two days.

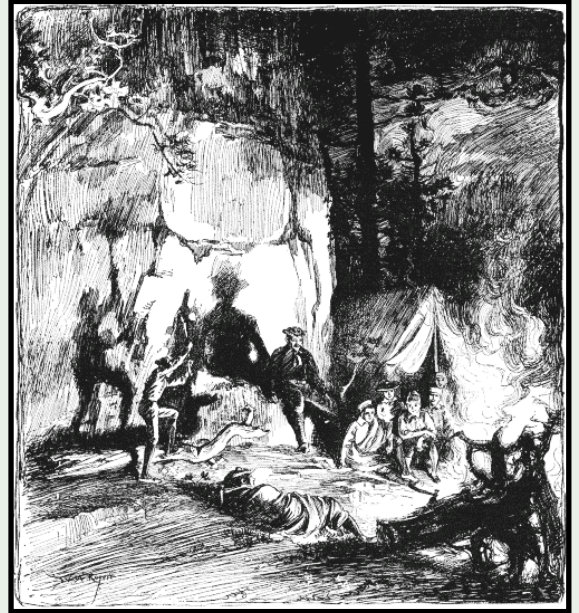
A few weeks later some little plays were acted by the boys. These were very clever productions, and they were excellently performed. The price of admission was modestly placed at fifteen cents, but the visitors gave more than that, since the object of the entertainment was to add to money already collected which was to be devoted to endowing a bed in a children's free hospital, so soon as the required amount could be raised. A huge bonfire was burning brightly on the shore, and dozens of red-capped boys darting about in its ruddy blaze, proved a picturesque contrast to the great white moon as it rose slowly above the mountains and threw a broad band of silvery light across the lake, while from boat to boat cheery "good-nights" rang over the water as the guests who had enjoyed the evening's festivities were rowed to shore.



These charities at Camp Chocorua mean, in the purest sense of the words, "helping others out of one's own store," for the money contributed by the boys is their own, fairly earned by them to do with as they please. Once in camp, an equal weekly allowance is given to every boy, no matter what may be the difference in their parents' means. This allowance is small, and if more money is desired, either for candy, or soda water, or as a contribution to the charities, or to buy materials for a new canoe, or to purchase a canoe already built,—for any extra luxury in fact,—the boy with such desires is obliged to earn the money needed, and work which is paid for at the regular rate of wages for labor will always be furnished him whereby he can earn it. Contracts can be taken for leveling paths, or building walls, or anything else which is needed at the camp, and the money earned by such work is deposited in the Chocorua Bank by the boy earning it. Against this amount on deposit, he draws his check in strict business fashion, which check is duly honored and cashed. If at the end of the term any surplus remains to his credit, he has entire right to dispose of it as he may choose, but no money from home is granted a boy exceeding the original sum stipulated as his weekly allowance. Just as men work

and make money, and learn how to use that money in the outer world, so do these boys work, and make money and use it in this miniature world at Camp Chocorua. By the time they are ready to enter a larger sphere in life, they know and appreciate the worth of money honestly earned, and understand the true art of spending it.

Lest the boys should in truth become very water-sprites, they go, toward the end of the term, for a week's tramp over the hills. A large canvas-topped wagon, drawn by oxen, carries blankets and provisions, and any boys who grow tired and foot-sore can have a lift when they feel like it. They camp out at night and have many amusing adventures by day; and at the different farmhouses to which they come in their wanderings, fresh milk is willingly furnished to the jolly, brown-faced, red-capped lads, who make the hills ring cheerily with their songs and laughter. Each year the



youngest boy of the whole party is called the camp "infant," and is accorded several extra privileges, not the least of which is the right of tasting the ice cream whenever it is made, without having been obliged to assist in making it.

Were I a boy, the life at Camp Chocorua would be my idea of a thoroughly good time, combining as it does plenty of fun, and a free, open-air life, with the acquisition of much useful knowledge for one's self, and the habit of exercising a thoughtful helpfulness for others.

### **Notice & Wonder**

- After reading the description of the summer at Camp Chocorua, what stands out to you? What do you notice?
- Make a list of the activities and chores the boys do throughout the summer. How would you categorize your list into different groups?
- In the last paragraph, the author says she would like to go to camp. What are her reasons? Find two pieces of evidence in the reading to support each of her reasons.
- Would you like to go to Camp Chocorua? Why or why not?